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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8025
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1433
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4939
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6084
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3960
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1923
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000644

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TAGS: [BM](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: LIVESTOCK AND HEALTH MINISTERS DELIVER
MIXED MESSAGES

REF: A. RANGOON 591
[1](#)B. RANGOON 585
[1](#)C. RANGOON 572
[1](#)D. RANGOON 102

Classified By: CDA Shari Villarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. During an August 7 farewell visit to Nay Pyi Daw, Charge met separately with Livestock and Fisheries Minister Maung Maung Thein and Health Minister Dr. Kyaw Myint. Both ministers favorably noted the outpouring of international assistance following Cyclone Nargis and considered the possibility of expanding relief efforts into cooperation on health and livestock related projects. The Livestock and Fisheries Minister was open to further collaboration with the United States, but noted that it would be difficult in the areas of science and technology. Both agreed that current cooperation on avian influenza (AI), HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria could lead to cooperation on other issues. However, the Health Minister came across as less optimistic. End Summary.

Room for Cooperation

[1](#)2. (C) The Charge opened her meeting with Minister of Livestock and Fisheries Maung Maung Thein by thanking him for his Ministry's efforts to cooperate on AI, including facilitating visas for USAID health officers. She encouraged the Minister to explain to other Burmese officials about how a little cooperation can lead to more assistance. The Minister responded that he supported enhanced cooperation with the U.S. on livestock issues, but that collaboration on issues such as science and technology would be more difficult.

[1](#)3. (C) The Minister told us that while Burma was producing animal vaccines, it could not produce enough to vaccinate all livestock and said the GOB lacked the capacity to respond to a large foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. He suggested the production of vaccines as one area where the U.S. and Burmese Governments could enhance cooperation. The Charge reaffirmed that U.S. cooperation was contingent on the GOB taking clear political steps towards democracy. When asked about the

status of preparations for the 2010 elections, Minister Maung Maung Thein replied that the GOB would continue in a systematic "step by step" fashion along its roadmap to democracy. He added that he preferred to stick to what he knew best, livestock and fisheries, and avoid politics.

Avian Influenza Cooperation

14. (C) Maung Maung Thein detailed the GOB's efforts to contain AI. He told the Charge his Ministry had disposed of 800,000 birds since 2006 but had been unable to fully compensate farmers for their losses (Ref D). The Charge acknowledged the efforts, emphasizing that the Ministry's transparent and prompt response to AI and willingness to share information would encourage the international community to provide additional assistance.

Post-Nargis Rehabilitation of Fishing Sector

15. (C) Maung Maung Thein also spoke of his Ministry's rehabilitation of the fishing sector following Cyclone Nargis (Refs A and C). The 3-month effort would conclude by the end of August. Working with the Myanmar Fishing Federation, the Ministry had completed 6,000 of the 9,000 promised replacement fishing boats and were working with the private sector to distribute 20,000 units of replacement nets and other fishing gear. The Ministry had also extended a total of 2.8 billion kyat (\$2.4 million) in loans to fish and prawn farmers, bringing the total of the GOB's fisheries

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rehabilitation efforts to 7.38 billion kyat (\$6.3 million).

Replenishing Livestock in the Delta

16. (C) In response to the Charge's question about the GOB's provision of farm animals to rice farmers in the cyclone-affected areas, Maung Maung Thein replied that the GOB had provided 3,000 draft animals from around Burma, as well as 2,000 pigs, 20,000 chickens, and 30,000 ducks, worth a combined total of 120 million kyat (\$102,000). He confirmed reports that some of the draft animals supplied from the northern areas were unable to acclimate to the delta or understand local commands, thus impeding their ability to work (Ref B). Maung Maung Thein thanked the Charge for the animal feed that the USG provided as part of its C-130 supply flights, noting that feeding the draft animals had been a challenge.

Burma's Health Sector Can Take Care of Itself

16. (C) During a separate call, the Charge thanked Minister of Health Dr. Kyaw Myint for having facilitated the international community's post-Nargis health efforts, and urged him take advantage of new levels of cooperation to allow the international community to expand its health programs to other regions in Burma. Although the Minister agreed that the formation of the Tripartite Core Group and the completing of the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) report showed that cooperation was possible, he said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had the lead on international cooperation issues.

17. (C) Despite his assurance that he was an "eternal optimist," the Health Minister appeared pessimistic about future GOB cooperation with the international community on health issues. Eyeing the TV cameras, he extolled the virtues of his Ministry's pre-cyclone emergency plan, which he claimed kept post-cyclone disease outbreaks to a minimum. While he appreciated the assistance provided immediately after the cyclone, he said the most pressing need was to build new medical infrastructure in the delta. He asserted

that Burmese doctors could take care of the people's medical needs. When asked about the possibility for private medical teams to visit Burma, the Minister conceded that the international community could help Burma by providing highly specialized skills, such as eye surgery and joint replacement procedures.

Comment

18. (C) Maung Maung Thein's friendly demeanor and openness to continuing cooperation on agricultural and animal health issues directly contrasted with Dr. Kyaw Myint's nervous fidgeting and equivocating on possible future health cooperation. Perhaps this is because the Livestock and Fisheries Minister is confident in his position (he reportedly is close to Maung Aye). The Health Minister, despite being Than Shwe's personal physician, is rumored to be on his way out. He seemed almost obsequious to his Deputy, who reportedly is trying to get his job. The Health Minister is one of two civilians in the cabinet. He has been very cautious about pushing regime leaders too hard. At the same time UN agencies and INGOs praised his willingness to advocate, even quietly, on their behalf.

VILLAROSA